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("Upheaval") and worked briefly on "The West Wing." Then, last summer, a friend on the board of Pilobolus approached him about the executive director's job.

"Finding the right fit was crucial," recalled Ms. Chase. "We felt that Itamar, as the youngest candidate, had the ability to evolve and grow with us. We didn't want a turnaround artist who would shake things up and leave in two years."

So far, he has proven to be a quick study.

"Itamar is a great match for us," said Mr. Barnett, 54. "He's energetic, considerate and smart as hell. I think he absorbs information as fast as anyone I know."

Renée Jaworski, who joined the troupe in 2000, worried at first that he might turn the Pils into a "bus and truck" company, taking one big show on the road for six months at a time. But she quickly saw that he shared her artistic vision. Moreover, in her role as dance captain, she has found that he keeps the artistic directors off her back.

"Part of my job is deciding which pieces we need to rehearse," she said. "Sometimes that bugs the choreographers, who pressure me to spend more time on their pieces. With Itamar, I've got someone to fight those battles for me."

There are no signs of the artistic directors creating dances together again, as they did throughout the 1970's and 80's and into the 90's. Instead, they sometimes turn to Mr. Kubovy as a sounding board.

"I need someone I can talk with," said Mr. Wolken. "I want someone who will be able to tell me, 'Jonathan, that's the most idiotic thing I've ever heard, a waste of time and energy,' as well as, 'That's great; let's go with it.' Itamar is that person. He does

not have a heavy hand. He's able to mix with us stylistically."

Mr. Kubovy, who commutes several times a week from the East Village, where he lives with his wife and daughter, found the troupe's paperwork in decent order, although the deficit last year ran to nearly \$100,000. The company expects to break even this year with projected revenues of \$2 million.

To help secure Pilobolus's legacy, Mr. Kubovy wants to establish a company school in New York that teaches choreography. Plans are also afoot to set up an archive at a major library or university. And as the troupe nears its 35th anniversary, he hopes to revive and document seminal works that have fallen out of the repertoire.

The time may come when Mr. Kubovy has to impose a decision against the will of some of the artistic directors.

"The danger is that he'll be played," said Mr. Tracy, still bristling at some of his colleagues.

Mr. Kubovy agreed that the situation bears an eerie likeness to John Guare's "Lydie Breeze" plays, which he directed four summers ago at the New York Theater Workshop. Set in the late 19th century, the tale begins with three men and a female mentor who set up a commune on Nantucket. Rising tensions within the group eventually lead to murder and suicide.

Things have never gotten so dire at Pilobolus, and if Mr. Kubovy can help it, they never will. "A director's role is to protect the play," he said. "I feel like the play here is Pilobolus, and I'm the protector; I have to make sure that individual impulses don't run wild at the wrong moment." □